



## **BRIEFING MEMO**

DATE: January 6, 2013  
TO: Board of Park Commissioners  
FROM: David Graves, Senior Planner  
SUBJECT: Bicycle Policy Update

### **Requested Board Action**

Based on recent discussions, Parks staff is recommending that the proposed Bicycle Policy update be put on hold until such time as a pilot project can be implemented and evaluated. To that end, Parks staff is requesting the Boards' support in moving Cheasty Greenspace forward as a pilot project site on which to implement and evaluate mountain bike trail(s).

### **Background**

Parks staff has been before the Board twice, in October and November, to discuss the existing bicycle policy and the issue of potentially allowing mountain bike trails in appropriate areas of Parks' greenbelts and natural areas. The Board has also heard public testimony both in favor of and opposed to mountain bike trails in our natural areas and greenbelts.

Given the concerns raised by the Board and the Board's desire for an opportunity to evaluate mountain bike trails on the ground, as other surrounding jurisdictions have been doing for many years; a pilot project was suggested. The neighbors of Cheasty Greenspace have an existing proposal to build mountain bike trails at Cheasty. This proposal was presented as an Opportunity Fund project but was turned down due to conflicts with the existing bicycle policy. The Cheasty proposal is currently the only proposal for bike trails in natural areas. The proponents have community support and a proven track record in undertaking forest restoration and building hiking trails within a section of the Cheasty Greenspace. They are generating volunteer support sufficient to undertake the trail construction in their proposal.

## **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends moving forward with the Cheasty trail proposal as a pilot project to enable staff to evaluate mountain bike trail construction and subsequent operation in a natural area. The proposal would be subject to Parks standard internal review and public process before any construction takes place.

## **Proposal**

Staff from Parks' Natural Resources Unit (NRU) which includes our existing trail crew would take the lead in reviewing the Cheasty Trails pilot. NRU staff would coordinate their review with Parks Planning & Development Division (PDD) staff. PDD staff could lead the public process. NRU staff has extensive information on the forest health and soils at Cheasty and will present this information to the Board on January 9<sup>th</sup>. This information provides the trail development criteria by which staff would evaluate the actual trail location, construction methods, and maintenance standards and associated forest restoration opportunities. The following lays out the process for evaluating the pilot at Cheasty, with the following assumption: The public process and subsequent trail construction would be completed and the trail(s) would be open for riding by June 2015. If public process and trail construction is completed sooner, the following time frames would adjust accordingly.

The evaluation period should be 12 months to monitor the trail through the four seasons. Trail monitoring would occur once a quarter – Parks staff would walk the trail(s) in June 2015 (or once completed) to establish the baseline condition and then again in September 2015, December 2015, March 2016, and June 2016 to observe the trail conditions.

Staff evaluation of the trails would include:

- General trail condition
- Estimated trail usage.
- Increased parking issues or impacts.
- Noting areas of trail erosion and/or standing water, with recommended fixes
- Noting areas of trail damage, with recommended fixes
- Evidence of bicycles not staying within the constructed trail corridor
- General vegetation health within the immediate trail corridor
- Areas of damaged and or dying vegetation within the trail corridor
- Any signs of wildlife (note that a lack of wildlife present during a visit does not mean that there is no wildlife in the area, only that they are not present at that time)
  - Note: Seasonal changes in wildlife use and life cycles may impact this measure.
- Maintenance activities undertaken during the preceding quarter include trail maintenance and vegetation management activities and volunteer hours. Records to be acquired from Green Seattle Partnership CEDAR system.
- Records from Parks PLANT system to evaluate impacts on Parks staff.
- Increases or decreases in trash and or encampments in area
- Development of unplanned trails.

Staff evaluations would be written with attached photo documentation. At the end of the evaluation period, staff will make a determination/recommendation as to whether or not to amend the bicycle policy as originally proposed to allow the potential for trails in other greenbelts/natural areas within the City.

At this time staff has not developed criteria for *where* to locate a mountain bike trail within the parks system, as there is only one proposal on the table for the pilot – Cheasty. If the pilot is successful, staff will develop locational criteria to be used for siting any additional trails. It is likely that not all greenbelts or natural areas would be appropriate locations for the siting of a mountain bike trail. For example, many greenbelts and natural areas are small and/or dominated by natural features such as Thornton Creek that would preclude the siting of a trail.

### **Public Involvement Process**

Parks staff will facilitate a public process to review the Cheasty Trails Pilot consistent with our Public Involvement Policy.

### **Issues**

The central issue remains acknowledging mountain bikes as a legitimate recreational use and accommodating that use in a way that balances public access, recreation, environmental stewardship and restoration. People treasure the green associated with Parks' Greenbelts and Natural Areas even though some areas are home to invasive species and illegal and illicit activities. Encouraging positive recreational activities and fostering stewardship and restoration activities can have a beneficial impact, both socially and ecologically.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Any new trail would have to be sustainable; volunteers would be expected to undertake restoration efforts as well as trail construction to help further the work of the Green Seattle Partnership.

### **Budget**

This pilot project has budget implications as it will require staff resources to review the proposal, oversee any construction, manage the public process and evaluate the long term impacts of any constructed trail. A specific budget amount has not been calculated nor has a funding source been identified.

**Schedule**

Parks staff could begin working on the Cheasty Trails pilot upon direction from the Superintendent.

**Additional Information**

For more information, you can contact David Graves at [david.graves@seattle.gov](mailto:david.graves@seattle.gov).